

Transport

Rocky Mountain Helicopters excel at rescue missions

By KEVIN NIENDORF
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PROVO — In the lobby of the Provo-based Rocky Mountain Helicopters, Inc. building near the Provo Airport hangs a painting of an old biplane aircraft with a Red Cross banner draped across its tail.

The painting is symbolic of the hundreds of medical rescue missions RMHI has undertaken nationwide over the past 20 years, including Monday's well-publicized rescue of three Mt. McKinley climbers in Alaska.

"To them it's kind of all in a days work," said Elaine Walters, public relations coordinator at RMHI, of the pilots who perform the rescue efforts. "They're proud and we're proud of what they do."

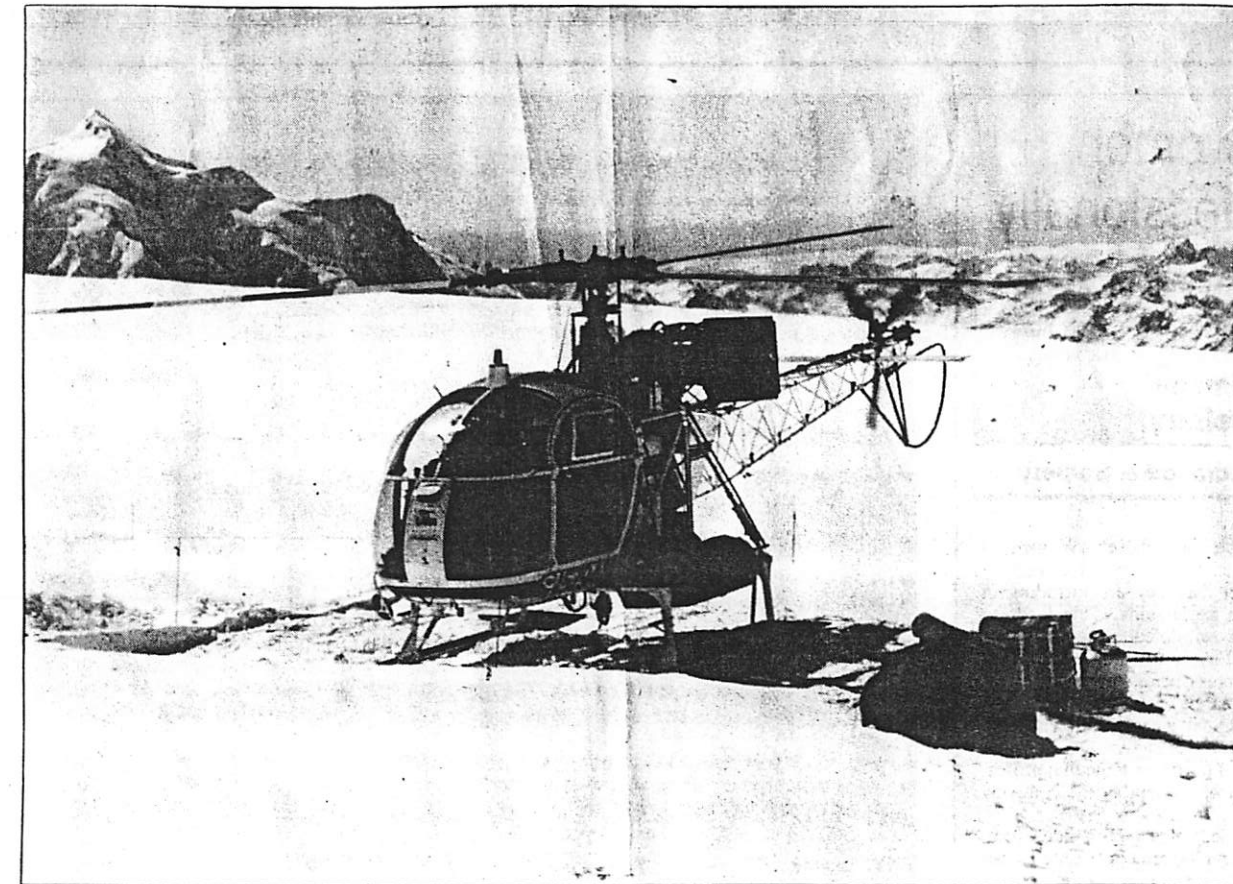
What they do, according to Walters, is put their lives on the line by transporting medical personnel to stranded or injured individuals who need immediate medical care.

Pilot Bill Ramsey flew his light weight Aerospatiale Lama helicopter to 18,000 feet where he rescued the South Korean climbers stranded seven days in a snow cave. According to park service ranger J.D. Swede, "(Ramsey) is a hero in every sense of the word."

"We're always reminded it's a very, very dangerous business (we're in)," said Walters. "They handle it very well ... that's their job."

She said RMHI is the largest of three or four major businesses which perform similar rescue operations. Nationwide, RMHI contracts its aviation support services to hospitals and healthcare facilities. When those hospitals receive an emergency call, it calls the RMHI affiliate (currently 49 nationwide) and off the medical team goes.

However, RMHI made history



This Aerospatiale Lama helicopter, shown on Mt. McKinley, was used during a rescue mission Monday of three Korean climbers.

by flying three medical rescue missions since 1990 to Russia, opening up international contacts. Most recently, an engineer for the Caterpillar heavy equipment company was flown from the Russian city of Magadan.

A hospital there could not provide sufficient treatment for the man who suffered a severe heart

attack. The man was transported to Alaska's Providence Hospital where he underwent emergency triple by-pass surgery and lived.

The other two flights into Russia involved transporting burn victims to the U.S.

Its fleet of 120 aircraft, 90 of which are helicopters, are flown primarily by Vietnam veterans or

others who have wartime flying hours under their belts. In fact, the idea of air medical transportation originated in Vietnam, said Walters.

James Burr and his brother, Bob, took that idea and obtained their first contract with St. Anthony's Hospital in Denver, which still has a contract with RMHI today.

The idea has carried over to contracting for remote/aerial construction, charter flight services and heli-logging, where timber is removed from deep can-

yons or steep hillsides. In fiscal year 1991, those contracts resulted in 55,175.5 flight hours. The medical division accounted for 32,709 of those hours.